

WILD THING: INSIDE A MEN'S GROUP

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WHO DECIDES  
WHAT'S NEWS?

# The Reader

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The best of the alternative press

## PARADISE F · O · U · N · D

*How the environmental crisis  
can improve our lives*



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## Ecofeminists draw the connections between sexism and environmental degradation

The women of Kenya's green belt movement band together to plant millions of trees in arid deforested environments. In India's Chipko (tree-hugging) movement, women work together to preserve precious forests for their local communities. Women in Sweden prepare jam from berries sprayed with herbicides and offer a taste to members of parliament (they refuse the offer). In Canada, women take to the streets with a petition opposing uranium mining in sites near their hometowns. In the United States, women organize the cleanup of rivers and hazardous waste sites. All these actions are examples of a worldwide movement known as ecofeminism, dedicated to restoring the natural environment.

The term *ecofeminism* was coined by French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to represent women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution. Ecofeminism is a response to the perception that both women and nature have been devalued in Western culture and that both can be elevated and liberated through direct political action. The earth is being dominated by male-controlled industrialization, technology, and science. Women are being dominated by the complex set of social patterns called capitalist patriarchy—in which men labor in the marketplace and women labor in the home or in low-status jobs.

The scientific revolution of the 17th century changed Western society's prevailing view of nature. From an earlier status as a goddess or a nurturing mother, nature was transformed into a machine to be controlled and repaired by men. Simultaneously, social and economic changes brought by capitalism eroded the peasant and artisan way of life, in which men and women worked together in the home. An increasingly industrialized society was dominated by men, with domestic life remaining the preserve of women. Women's



labor in the home was (and still is) unpaid and perceived to be subordinate to men's labor in the marketplace. Both women and nature were subordinated to the male-driven industrial society.

Another connection between women and nature centers on their role in biological reproduction. Women are perceived to be closer to nature because of their capacity for bearing children. This connection is the source of many women's ecological activism in defense of a healthy home and family life. Women frequently protest radioactivity from nuclear wastes, power plants, and bombs as a potential cause of birth defects and cancers. They argue that hazardous waste sites near schools and homes permeate soil and drinking water, producing statistically higher cases of leukemia, miscarriages, and birth defects among local families. They object to pesticides and herbicides being sprayed on crops and forests as potentially affecting childbearing women living near them. Such actions can sometimes also raise women's consciousness of their own oppression. For example, many lower-middle-class women became politicized through protests over toxic chemical wastes at Love Canal.

But ecofeminism has its critics. They point out that any analysis stressing women's "special" qualities ties them to a "special" biological or "natural" destiny that thwarts the possibility of liberation. But more and more ecologically concerned women are turning to ecofeminism as the most inspiring way to empower themselves while at the same time restoring ecological balance to the earth.

—Caroline Merchant  
*New Internationalist*

Excerpted with permission from the leftist global affairs magazine *New Internationalist* (May 1987). Subscriptions: \$30/yr. (12 issues) from Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092. Back issues: \$3 from same address.

## The spirit of Green politics for taking politics.

completely hooked on dendrophile (tree love). Since then I've had many more relations with trees, enriched, and enthused to describe. Trees on Earth, and one so involved.

**M**y strongest connection with the political is the political. However uncomfortable political confrontation.

I do not believe in Green movement and politics. Spirit of a disengagement, but a work. The spiritual reason why we cannot sustain that.

Adapted with permission from *One Earth* (Winter/Findhorn Foundation, a holistic approach). Subscriptions: \$15/horn Foundation, OTZ. Back issues: this article were at (March/April 1988) to spiritual and ecological. \$20/yr. (6 issues) from Minor St., Emmaus, same address.